



GST Newsletter

Issue 16, November 2025

Introduction

Welcome back to the second half of the Autumn term. As part of the Learning Improvement Service (LIS) the Governor Support Team (GST) are here to support you and your board.

If you would like to refer back to any information in previous newsletters see the Governor Support Team [**\(GST\) website.**](#)

Action

Westmorland and Furness School Governance Survey

In September, we launched our first annual governance survey, designed to provide a richer, more localised insight into school governance across Westmorland and Furness. We know your time is valuable, so we've kept the format simple and quick to complete. The more responses we receive, the more meaningful and representative the findings will be.

[Link to complete the survey](#)

The deadline for responses was originally set for 26 October 2025, thank you for those that have already responded. To help us gather as many responses as possible, we have extended the deadline for another four weeks until **23 November 2025**. We appreciate your continued support and time.

Chair, headteacher, clerk/governance professional and Local Authority (LA) governor details

As part of our duties within the LA, there may be occasions when we need to reach out directly to chairs, clerks, or governance professionals.

In September, we announced the launch of our annual data collection each autumn term, to ensure our records for these roles remain accurate and current.

We kindly ask that your clerk/governance professional continues to notify us of any mid-term resignations or new appointments to these roles throughout the year.

Can clerks/governance professionals please complete the [Annual Governing Board Membership Details request.](#)

Please note that the deadline for submitting updated information is **31 January 2026**.



Persistent absence remains normal for many pupils

Each morning, pupils make an active decision about whether to attend school and while sanctions may compel attendance, they often damage engagement. These are the findings of a [new Impetus report](#) which listens to and learns from young people.

Late-night online gaming and group chats have been identified as leaving many pupils too tired to attend school. To address this, schools are encouraged to value and structure social time and expand enrichment beyond the classroom.

Susannah Hardyman MBE, Chief Executive of Impetus, said: "We urgently need to rethink what is driving absence and how it is managed. That means more connection and more choice in a school environment that works for young people, not just on them".

As a governing board do you know:

- If all pupils feel welcome and supported at school?
- How your absence data compares to other schools locally and nationally?
- If there are any absence patterns, trends ie disadvantage groups?
- If staff have received training to enable them to support good attendance?

News/Updates/Information

In addition to the Department for Education (DfE) [School Governance](#) update, the following topics are covered below on: climate action plans, reading, Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence, Ofsted inspections, changes to school uniforms, Post 16, Early Years, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, safeguarding and finance.

All schools

Sustainability and climate change strategy for education

The [sustainability and climate change strategy for education](#) states: "By 2025, all education settings will have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan". This includes early years settings, schools, multi-academy trusts, colleges, and universities. More detail can be obtained by visiting the DfE website link.

Support and intervention in schools

Following [consultation](#), the [DfE Support and intervention in schools statutory guidance](#) has been updated to include information about Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) teams, including the universal service and targeted intervention, and how DfE will mandate RISE interventions where necessary. The guidance has also been updated to include a policy on 'stuck' schools, previously referred to as schools that are 'coasting', as defined in the Coasting Schools (England) Regulations 2022.

Alongside the revised guidance the DfE issued a press release, explaining that the RISE teams will extend their reach this term to work with more schools. The [press release](#) states that a consultation will be launched later this term, asking how the RISE teams could directly support schools with the lowest levels of attainment.

The government is also launching a digital tool for headteachers, to enable them to see the strengths and weaknesses within their school(s) and benchmark school performance against similar schools. A pilot version is due this academic year, prior to national release in 2026/27. Alongside this new tool for schools the government has committed to introduce new digital 'school profiles' for parents, providing 'an online one-stop-shop that will give parents a complete picture of their local school, from attendance to attainment, helping families make the best choices for their children's future.'

Other RISE resources are available at the [RISE school support website](#).

The Children's Plan

The Children's Commissioner, has published the Children's Plan, following feedback from children and young people, school leaders, staff, and families. The plan highlights seven areas which the Government will consider as part of the School's White Paper.

The Children's Commissioner states that 'Our current system focuses on three main routes for support: pupil premium, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and support for looked-after children. This doesn't capture the full complexity of children's lives. Wider needs are too often either unrecognised, ignored, or shoehorned into a SEND system which isn't designed to provide the right support, where wider needs often manifest as learning needs. No child should be pushed to getting a medical diagnosis for behaviours that are natural responses to the challenges they are facing in their lives. No child should think they are the problem for feeling sad, or different.'

'We need an education system that is inclusive by design, where all schools, and all classrooms, are equipped and supported to meet the needs of all children. We need a system that's built on what children tell us they want: to go to a good school and spend time with their friends. To learn and have fun. To get a great job. To feel safe and happy.'

'It [the report] calls for some significant changes: a new focus on additional needs; more specialist staff in schools; integrated specialist provision; a statutory framework for multi-agency working and greater delivery capacity across children's services; a unique identifier that makes the state easier to navigate for children, parents and professionals. Ultimately, it calls for a plan to support every child who falls behind developmentally or academically.'

The seven areas of focus recommended in the report are:

- A national statement of ambition for all children
- A new focus on a broader range of additional needs for those who need support inside and outside the classroom
- Extra help for schools to deliver targeted and specialist support where needed, and deepen their role, impact and orientation in communities
- A new approach to statutory education support: Education, Health and Care plans
- Delivering opportunity locally – Local Opportunity Mission Delivery Boards
- The critical role of special schools and Alternative Provision
- Services beyond the school gate.

You can read a [summary](#) of The Children's Plan or the [full version](#) of the plan.

The Education Secretary made a [speech to launch the plan](#).

Ofqual writes to governors and trustees

Sir Ian Bauckham CBE, Chief Regulator at Ofqual has written a [letter](#) to governors and trustees outlining the local and national context to GCSE, AS and A levels, and vocational and technical results as well as how to prepare for exams and assessments in the future.

National Governance Association (NGA) – school complaints landscape

NGA has produced some [research](#) that explores the volume, nature and themes of complaints in schools and trusts.

The report found that the main topics of complaint relate to SEND, teacher interaction, bullying, school management and attendance.

Focus on reading in secondary years to drive up standards

The Education Secretary [confirms](#) all pupils will sit a mandatory reading test at age 13 to drive up reading standards.

Designed as a snapshot of pupils' reading ability, the test will not require pupils to revise.

Performance data will be shared only with Ofsted and the government, while schools will provide individual results directly to parents.

The new test forms part of the government's National Year of Reading, alongside new teacher training programmes in secondary schools to help young people develop stronger reading skills.

Education White Paper

In her [speech](#) at the CST conference, the Education Secretary sets out core tenets of the upcoming schools white paper, which will lay the path for national renewal for schools.

However since this speech, the schools white paper has been delayed until the new year to allow for further work on SEND reform policy options as outlined in [a letter from Bridget Phillipson](#).

The future of post-16 education revealed in Skills White Paper

From 2027, 'V levels' will be introduced as a new level 3 vocational qualification existing alongside A levels (the academic route) and T levels (the technical route). They form a key part of the strategy outlined in the government's recently published [post-16 Education and Skills White Paper](#).

Aiming to streamline qualifications currently offered at level 3, V levels are proposed to have a similar amount of teaching hours to A levels but with an increased proportion of non-exam assessment. They are also planned to be broader, subject-based qualifications compared to occupationally specialised T levels.

The government has [launched a consultation](#) on how the new pathways will work in practice.

DfE launch Best Start in Life campaign

DfE has launched the [Best Start in Life campaign](#), aimed at helping parents navigate online misinformation about early childhood development. The initiative brings together National Health Service and government-backed guidance.

Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson said: "The path to opportunity for every child begins in the early years, and ensuring children are ready to learn and thrive when they start school is vital – yet new parents face an overwhelming amount of conflicting online information."

The campaign is part of a wider government effort to improve early years support and outcomes.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) data submitted in summer 2026 onwards will be shared with Ofsted. This will enable Ofsted inspectors to ask relevant questions about the EYFSP and encourage school and Multi-Academy Trust leaders to recognise the importance of the early years.

Information added into Analyse School Performance and the Inspection Data Summary Report will communicate key messages about this, including that Ofsted will not make gradings solely using EYFSP data. The [EYFSP handbook](#) provides further information.

The Good Level of Development data tool has now been launched, enabling schools to compare outcomes, explore trends and identify strengths and areas for improvement within the EYFS. The tool is available via the ['view your education data'](#) site.

Girls facing multiple inequalities less likely to participate in physical activity

Girls are over three times more likely than boys to not like taking part in PE and those with multiple inequalities, such as a low-income family, a non-majority ethnicity, or having SEND, are significantly less likely to be active daily than their peers. This is according to a recent [Youth Sport Trust survey](#).

The [Well Check](#), a free-to-access self-review tool developed by the Youth Sport Trust, gives schools a tailored development plan to promote pupil health and wellbeing.

Wellbeing resources

Wellbeing is important for everyone, below are some links to various resources that are available for everyone to access:

- [Westmorland and Furness – Health and wellbeing service](#)
- [MIND](#)
- [Education Support - Breathing Exercise Guide](#)
- [Cumbria CVS - Spring 25 Better Mental Health Toolkit](#)
- [Every Life Matters – Suicide prevention training in Cumbria](#)

Cost of school uniforms

DfE have updated the [statutory guidance](#), which now includes draft statutory guidance relating to the proposed limit on the number of branded items of school uniform and PE kit that schools can require.

The government intends to make this a legal requirement from September 2026 through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Academy settings – introduction of ‘verify your identity’ requirements

Individuals who are part of the Trust board and academy Members will be required to verify their identity for Companies House. This new requirement comes into force from 18 November 2025. It is free of charge to verify your identity, the online process involves creating a GOV.UK One Login.

[Further information](#) available.

Finance

Academy Trust Handbook

DfE have updated the [Academy Trust Handbook](#) relating to special severance payments following [guidance](#) issued by HM Treasury.

Academies Severance Payments

In addition DfE has also updated the [Academies severance payments](#) guide relating to special severance payments following [guidance](#) issued by HM Treasury.

Fraud Awareness

Fraud is an increasing threat to state organisations, and in education, every pound lost is a blow to children's learning. The DfE has released [new guidance on fraud awareness](#) to help education and training providers strengthen fraud prevention efforts. Additional resources:

- [NGA - blog on fraud prevention](#)
- [Academy trust financial management: good practice guides](#)

School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

The 2025/26 SFVS needs to be completed and submitted by **31 March 2026**. The SFVS requires schools to benchmark their income and expenditure against other similar schools. In order to facilitate this, the [Home - Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool - GOV.UK](#) has now been updated with 2024/25 financial year data.

Funding for school and trust estates

Applications are now open for the [condition improvement fund](#) (CIF) for the 2026/27 academic year. The CIF is a type of capital funding provided to schools to keep their buildings in good working order or to support expansion projects. Eligible schools must bid to access the funding. [Visit the DfE website](#) for more information.

If your school needs to address urgent condition issues that pose the threat of immediate school closure, you can [apply for urgent capital support](#).

National Insurance contributions grant for 2025 to 2026

[Guidance](#) for schools and LAs on the National Insurance contributions grant for financial year 2025 to 2026, which includes payment timings for LAs and academies.

OFSTED

School Inspections recommence

School inspections in England recommenced on November 3, 2025. This date marks the start of the new inspection framework, and schools will be notified of their inspection from 9:30 am on that Monday.

Below is a list of resources that you may find helpful with the introduction of the new inspection framework:

- [Education Inspection Framework](#)
- Honeyguide has provided a [summary](#) of the new framework
- [School Inspection Toolkit](#)
- [School Inspection Operating Guide](#)
- [Inspection information for state-funded schools](#), for a general audience

For your interest Sir Martyn Oliver has made a number of speeches/communications referencing the new inspection framework:

- [Sir Martyn Oliver's speech at the Childcare and Education Expo in Coventry](#)
- [Sir Martyn Oliver thanks education leaders for their commitment to children and young people](#)
- [Sir Martyn Oliver's speech to the Confederation of School Trusts](#)
- [Sir Martyn Oliver's speech at the Young Carers Futures Conference'](#)

Ofsted education inspections: hearing from children, learners, parents, carers and staff

[Findings from research on how stakeholders can share their views during inspections](#), carried out by the independent research consultancy, the Behavioural Insights Team.

Ofsted's approach to AI

Ofsted have published new [guidance](#) on Ofsted's use of artificial intelligence (AI) and moved existing guidance on how Ofsted looks at AI during inspection and regulation to this page. The previous document, 'Ofsted's approach to artificial intelligence (AI)', has been withdrawn.

Big Listen action monitoring reports

Ofsted has published its most recent [monitoring report \(September 2025\)](#) on commitments made in the Big Listen and its response to Dame Christine Gilbert's independent learning review.

Safeguarding

Safer Internet Day, 10 February 2026 - UK Safer Internet Centre

The UK Safer Internet Centre has announced its theme for this year's Safer Internet Day coming up in February 2026. Each year the event gets bigger and this year their chosen theme is [‘smart tech, safe choices and exploring Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) and its responsible use.’](#) Children and young people have been delving into AI at an exponential rate, it is important that they have the skills and knowledge to make choices when using said programmes.

The Safer Internet team have released new educational resources addressing chatbots, AI ethics, parental advice when it comes to AI and on the safe use of emerging technologies. They also have a [Governor and Trustee guide and resources page](#).

The Children's Society has recently published an article re chatbots which you may find interesting: [Chatbots and Children | The Children's Society](#)

Generative Artificial Intelligence Policy Paper

DfE have produced a [Generative Artificial Intelligence Policy Paper](#). Firebird, a data protection consultancy, have written a [summary](#) of the recent DfE guidance on its use in education settings which may be of interest.

Online Safety for Parents - London Grid for Learning

The London Grid for Learning has developed a new [Parent Online Safety Toolkit for Schools](#). It has been designed to help empower parents to keep their children safe and start those key safeguarding conversations. Based on the latest research, risks and trends around generative AI, social media and gaming, it includes a ready-to-use presentation for staff to deliver to parents and is free to all schools to download at <https://parentonlinesafety.lgfl.net/>.

SEND

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on SEND

The APPG has launched a [report](#), Reforming the SEND system in England, with a number of recommendations:

- A system overhaul
- Significant funding reform
- Workforce investment
- Early intervention focus
- Accountability and oversight
- Escalation and resolution
- Rebuilding trust.

Similar concerns are echoed in the Education Select Committee's latest inquiry, which reported the impacts on pupil wellbeing and attainment.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson [writes](#) to the Education Select Committee following their report on the SEND system.

Both reports call for greater collaboration between education, health and social care services as a way to increase parental trust and confidence in the system.

The government has announced upcoming reform to the SEND system, expected to be set out in the schools white paper next year.

Parentkind: Survey reveals parents' school worries

Parentkind has unveiled [The National Parent Survey 2025](#), marking the UK's largest annual parent poll. Conducted in partnership with The Times and The Sunday Times, and powered by YouGov, the survey captures over 134,000 insights from parents across the UK.

Speaking at the launch, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said: "It's up to all of us – parents, schools, and government too – to turn this around and rebuild the bonds of trust. Our upcoming white paper on schools will chart our path forward. And at the centre will be parents – and their engagement in their child's learning."

Socio-economic disadvantage amongst pupils with SEND

Children with SEND from poorer families are facing a double disadvantage, as they are less likely to get specialist support and have lower outcomes at key stage 4 than those from wealthier homes. This is according to [research from The Sutton Trust](#).

Recommendations encourage policy makers to acknowledge the relationship between socio-economic background and SEND and increasing the consistency of SEND identification within and between schools to minimise socio-economic disparities in identification and support.

Development and Training

Westmorland and Furness Training Offer: Governor Support Team Virtual Sessions 2025 to 2026

To support school governors/trustees to drive school development and deliver effective governance, we have a programme of planned virtual training sessions available for the 2025 to 2026 academic year listed below.

Booking: Places for these events can be booked via [SLA online](#).

If you have any issues accessing SLA online, please email the School Development Team at **school.development@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk** to book your place.

Introduction to governance

For newly appointed/elected governors, trustees, associate members and local academy committee members as an introduction to their new role, to help build confidence, outline expectations of the board and board members, and to consider the next steps in the development of their governance career.

Dates:

[11 February 2026, 5pm to 6.30pm](#)

[19 May 2026, 4pm to 5.30pm](#)

Looking forward to inspection!

This session outlines the process of an Ofsted Inspection, particularly useful for those who have not yet experienced an inspection and to consider and reflect their involvement and contribution to the process.

May be useful to all board members in light of the recent changes to the Ofsted inspection process.

Dates:

[10 February 2026, 6pm to 7.30pm](#)

[2 June 2026, 5pm to 6.30pm](#)

Introduction to the role of governance professional/clerk

For newly appointed Clerks, Governance Professionals as an introduction to their new role to help build confidence, outline expectations, and to consider the next steps in the development of their role.

Dates:

[12 February 2026, 5pm to 6.30pm](#)

New: Governance recruitment, induction and retention

Explore how effective recruitment and induction of governors, associate members, trustees, and local academy committee members can enhance volunteer retention and support the overall impact of school governance.

We will be sharing practical ideas, useful resources, and actionable next steps to help governing boards refine their approaches to attracting, onboarding, and retaining dedicated volunteers.

Dates:

[24 February 2026, 5pm to 6.30pm](#)

[20 May 2026, 4pm to 5.30pm](#)

New: Governance succession planning

This session provides delegates with a greater understanding of the board's role in securing board leadership as part of the boards role in fulfilling its strategic responsibilities. It will also consider ways in which to strengthen the governance team to develop/improve succession planning.

Dates:

[26 February 2026, 5pm to 6.30pm](#)

Clerking/Governance Professional Cluster Group 2025 to 2026

Dates, topics and links below for sessions for the next academic year. No need to book and free to attend for any clerk/governance professional who would like to attend.

Dates:

25 February 2026, 5pm to 6.30pm

Focus on school website, governance compliance

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 318 509 118 064 8

Passcode: ih6aQ3JE

3 June 2026, 4pm to 5.30pm

Focus on minutes

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 331 730 488 999 0

Passcode: Ep76Xm3i

Chair's Briefings

Following the inaugural Chairs' Briefing last term, led by Isobel Booler, Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion, dates and event links for this academic year are listed below. These sessions will serve as a valuable platform for sharing key information and updates from the LA. Attendees will also have the opportunity to hear from various speakers on a range of topics and areas impacting schools.

Dates and links:

4 March 2026, 6pm to 7pm

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 336 948 389 264 0

Passcode: jB7iy2F3

9 June 2026, 6pm to 7pm

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 378 160 903 595 0

Passcode: g8zR6bn7

New to a governance role

If you have newly joined a governing body/board or have taken on a leadership role, you may find the following resources helpful:

- NGA LL [Induction programme](#), a suite of seven modules covering key governance areas, perfect for those new to governance or those looking for a refresher
- [NGA – Role Descriptions for governors and trustees](#)
- [NGA – The staff governor role](#)
- [NGA – The parent governor role](#)
- [NGA – Chairs role description](#) (LA maintained, SAT and MATs)

Governance Continual Professional Development

Below are a selection of NGA Learning Link modules designed to support and inspire you in your role this term. Whether you are new to governance or looking to deepen your expertise, there's something here for everyone:

- [An introduction to the English education system](#)
- [An introduction to the strategic role of governance](#)
- [Setting performance objectives for executive leaders](#)
- [Recruiting a senior executive leader](#)
- [Management of workload and wellbeing: the governance role](#)
- [How to: run an effective admissions appeals panel](#)
- [Essential Safeguarding e-learning module](#), Read NGAs latest blog to learn more about how NGA Learning Link is reshaping safeguarding training.
- [Pupil premium](#)
- [The governance of SEND](#)
- **New e-learning module: Help protect your school from cyber threats** NGA has partnered with [Secure Schools](#) to develop a brand new e-learning module, [Cyber security](#) and governance covering the governing board's role in protecting schools from cyber threats.

This 30-minute module will help you recognise the common cyber threats facing schools and trusts, understand the boards' responsibilities as directed by the DfE and UK GDPR, and will provide you with practical steps to take and questions to ask.

New: NGA Session: Strengthen Your Governance Impact, 16 December 2025, 6pm to 7pm

Join a fresh NGA session, whether you're a seasoned or newly appointed governor, trustee, this session offers practical help and support to access tools to support your development:

- To learn about the NGAs Learning Link e-learning platform
- To see what e-learning modules are available and how they work
- To understand how to set up e-learning for yourself and your governing board
- To find out how to create an e-learning training plan for your governors and trustees

No need to book to attend, just click on the link below:

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 317 033 985 487 6

Passcode: WY6jK73H.

Look forward to seeing you there.

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

The SACRE is an independent body in England and Wales that advises Local Authorities on the provision of religious education and collective worship. [Westmorland and Furness SACRE](#) have a website and are offering some training specifically for governors and headteachers:

23rd April 2026: Cumbrian SACRE updates for school governors, 6-8pm. [Information and booking here.](#)

DfE Effective governance resources

DfE have published new [effective governance resources](#) to support strong and effective governance, and governance recruitment in schools and academy trusts.

Developed in collaboration with governance sector experts, it is designed for trustees, governors and governance professionals. It shares best practice, guidance and advice about five key themes:

- Working with governance professionals (clerks)
- Governing strategically
- Effective board reporting
- Effective and agile structures
- Recruiting governors and trustees.

Each document provides: principles of good practice and practical resources that boards, leaders and clerks (governance professionals) can use to support sustainable and effective governance.

NGA Complaints webinar

With the increase in parental complaints, NGA have a [webinar](#) that talks through the key issues and provides practical advice to ensure parent/carers voices are heard, whilst balancing staff wellbeing.

School to school support

Further to our article 'School to School Support' previously, the GST wish to remind any governors/trustees who feel they may be in a position to provide governance support to other boards on a voluntary basis, to contact the GST for an informal conversation.

We would like to extend this invite to include clerks (governance professionals).

Please contact either your Governor Support Assistant or drop an email to GST.mailbox.WAF@cumbria.gov.uk to discuss further or if you would just like a little bit more detail.

GST Contact Details

The GST continues to offer advice, support, and guidance, specific to your boards needs and can be contacted as follows:

Jane Lees

Governor Support Assistant

Email:

- jane.lees@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk
- GST.mailbox.WAF@cumbria.gov.uk

Telephone: 01228 226925

Mobile: 07768 027 244